Nebraska Observer
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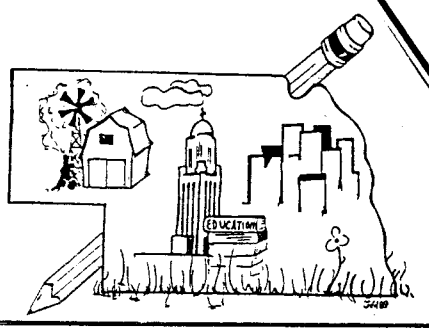
The Nebraska Observer

Vol 5, No. 4 March 28, 1990



formerly WHAMO
See WHAMO Pullout!

World-Herald Partial Owner of Election Company

How Secure Is Computer Ballot Counting?

by Frances Mendenhall

How secure is the system that counts our votes?

First you should ask who wants to know.

"The last person to question an election code are the people who were elected by it," pointed out Wayne Nunn.

Michael Shamos, on the other hand, commented that virtually everyone who has ever lost an election is willing to believe that it was due to some outside force, and the way the votes were counted is a common culprit.

Nunn is a project scientist for Union Carbide who supervises design and installation of large industry computer networks. Shamos is a computer scientist from Princeton. Both are frequently consulted on the subject of electronic vote counting.

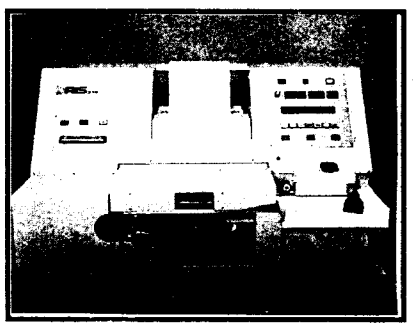
I became interested in the subject of the security of computer counted ballots because of my association with Ronnie Dugger. Dugger was the founder (twenty some years ago) and driving force behind the Texas Observer, one of several independent journals that the Nebraska Observer is modeled on. Dugger wrote a long study on computer vote counting which appeared in the New Yorker in November, 1988. When he visited Omaha late last year he brought my attention to a fact previously unknown to me and to surprisingly many Omahans: the company that counts the votes in Douglas and Lancaster Counties (and seventeen other Nebraska counties--more than 65% of Nebraska's votes) is partly owned by the World-Herald.

I lost an election a year and a half ago. At the time I had no thought of questioning the ballot count. Since gathering the facts for this article I have learned that there was no way to know independently that the count was accurate, although for other reasons I believe it probably was.

Omaha Company Counts the Votes

The firm that counts votes in Douglas county and 8 to 9 percent of the counties in the nation is a small Omaha company, American Information Systems. Its founder and current head is Robert Urosevich. Other important people in the operation are Jim Lane, who wrote the vote counting program, and Todd Urosevich, brother of Robert, who services the client counties. Lane and the Uroseviches have reputations of straight-arrow professionalism. In the two hours I spent interviewing Todd Urosevich, I was impressed with the thoroughness of his answers, and with the way his information squared with what I knew already.

American Information Systems (AIS) uses optical scanning technology to read ballots. The company, located at 11208 John Galt Blvd., employs 32 people. They assemble optical mark reading machines and supply counties with support services to count the ballots.



The AIS optical scan ballot reader

Optical scanning is the most trusted and these days the most frequently purchased technology for computerized vote counting. Voters make pencil marks on special slots on the ballots, and these marks are read by the scanner. The technology was modeled after SAT testing methods. It counts votes very quickly, reading 240 ballots per minute. Problems that were found in other systems have been minimized with the optical scanning system. For instance, where voting is done with punch cards, many votes were uncountable because of "chad," the scrap left dangling in a hole after an incomplete punch. The more people who handled a punch card, the less certainty there was of the voter's true intent. In other systems, where voters push a button or pull a lever without using a ballot, there is no audit trail of actual ballots. Ballots used in the optical scan method can be kept and referred to later.

In Douglas County, there are numerous fail-safe mechanisms being used to assure that only legitimately cast ballots are counted and none others. Some of these procedures are statutorily mandated. What the law does not assure, in Douglas County and many other places as well, however, is the security of the workings of the programs operating the counting machines themselves.

The machine that counts our votes is called the AIS 315. Douglas County owns five of them (see photo). Like all vote counting computers, they include a source code or program, (AIS calls theirs EPS, or "election parameter system") as well as the programming that is done to customize the machine for a particular election. The customizing programming is called "initializing." Although it is possible for the county to do its own initializing, virtually no counties do it. And as far as the primary code is concerned, no county has access to it, although company officials say that it is available to them. The situation in Douglas County is fairly typical; election officials do not know or want to know what the program inside the machine is doing. "Our part is minor," said Al Placek of Douglas County Data Processing. "I don't know what goes on those boards and neither does anyone else outside AIS."

Fail-safe Methods

This does not mean that there are no checks on the handful of industry people who tell the machine how to count the votes. In Douglas County the Election Commissioners and the county data processing people all run "test decks" of up to 150 sample ballots to assure themselves that the machine counts correctly. Even more importantly, the commissioners since the primary of 1989 have been randomly selecting precincts (seven in the primary, nine in the general) after the election and hand counting all their ballots, but it is not mandated by law that they do this in Douglas County or in most counties. Many elect not to randomly select precincts for hand counting of all their ballots after the election.

Ultimately, the only ones who know with any certainty what goes on inside the program, are almost completely limited to the handful of AIS people who program the machines and provide backup services. These are the same people who operate the counters on election night. It is still possible to construct a scenario where either this unchecked access, or undetected manipulation from outside the system, could rig an election.

The Reality of Computer Fraud

Is it being too paranoid to suggest that it could happen? Wherever there are computers, computer fraud has been found. Some of the vulnerabilities of computer systems were documented by Dugger in his piece in the New Yorker:

In recent years, the vulnerability of computers to tampering and fraud has become a commonplace in many industries. Computer operators do not leave fingerprints inside a computer, the events that occur inside it cannot be seen, and its records, and printouts can be fixed to give no hint of whichever of its operations an operator wants to keep secret. The practical problem of the computer age is invisibility. Hackers--adventurous programmers--penetrate corporate and governmental computers for fun and jimmy the programs in them for gain. "Electronic cat burglars" have stolen billions of dollars from banks and other businesses--a billion a year by recent estimate

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WHAMO

World-Herald Attitude Monitoring Operation

A citizen's organization providing an alternative voice

Vol. 5, No. 4
March 28, 1990

A New York Version of WHAMO

Media Critics Target Times, Publish Monthly Review

New Yorkers have gotten together and formed their own WHAMO. They call their effort "Lies of Our Times."

Lies of Our Times (known affectionately as LOOT) is a magazine of media criticism. "Our Times" are the times we live in but also the world of the New York Times, the most cited news medium in the U.S., and, they say, "our paper of record."

Their "Lies" are more than literal falsehoods; they encompass subjects that have been ignored, hypocrisies, misleading emphases, and hidden premises--the biases which systematically shape reporting.

LOOT features articles on subjects such as "CIA Spin," and "And Nelson Mandela Gets Spun," by various authors such as Graham Greene and Noam Chomsky.

In the current LOOT an article details "Who Killed Martin Luther King, Jr.?" Some food for thought:

At street level, African-American told us from the beginning that the government had assassinated Martin Luther King, but almost everyone agreed we could never get to the bottom of it. As we learned, for example, how documents and evidence could be forged by official agencies we were tempted to agree. But in seeking out surviving witnesses and experts on the case--many of whom had never been interviewed by the authorities or the media--it became very clear that there still remained gaping holes in the official story--individuals, issues, places, that have not been, should be, and still could be properly investigated.

"We can address only a sampling of the universe of media lies and distortions," says the masthead of the publication, "but over time, we hope Lies Of Our Times will go a long way toward correcting the record."

Subscriptions to LOOT are $24 per year. Their address is 145 West 4th St., New York, NY 10012.

Warning: These Contents Not For the Faint of Heart

The WHAMO crew has risen to new heights. Inside this WHAMO pullout you are now holding is a special April Fool's treat, guaranteed to go down in history for all fans of our favorite local daily.

You might like to know the genesis of this work. It began ten years ago when Patrick M. Higgins created a similar piece intended to run as a centerfold in the old Omaha magazine. Higgins recalls that the publishers were "completely intimidated by the World-Herald's possible (alleged?) reaction, and thus nixed the idea at the 11th hour."

Someone whose name we won't mention, a former W-H editor actually, said it struck all the raw nerves of our local daily's "persona." He wondered if Patrick worked at the W-H (he never has), to have "hit the hot buttons."

That was ten years ago. Amazing how some things never change.

More recently, Higgins, together with WHAMO editors John Boyd and Frances Mendenhall, put their alleged heads together and came up with the following two pages. "We were pleased, but not really surprised at how little updating the piece really needed," said Mendenhall. "The tone and the whole attitude are still current."

Enjoy.

Most Papers Favor Letters With Opposing Views

The following guidelines are from a profile compiled by the American Press Institute and printed in The Masthead, Spring, 1988.

What criteria do newspapers use in selecting letters to the editor?

At most papers, they must be verified. Often there are length limits. The letters should be topical. They should be free of libel, personal attacks or slurs. They should be coherent. There should be variety and a balance of views. Other criteria mentioned: no form letters; no poetry; no thank-yous; no business complaints; no announcements; no photocopied letters written to other parties; no school projects; no profanity; no theological arguments. Some papers limit frequent writers to one appearance every month or two.

Preference is often given to letters responding to, or in disagreement with, the newspaper's editorials or news stories; to letters opening up new issues or new perspectives; examples of good writing; anything that has flashes of humor.

Every paper in the seminar edits the letters it prints, and all but a handful publish notices to that effect.

Most editing is done by anyone available, although a few papers have special editors for letters. In one case it's done by a staff assistant.

Every paper requires that the letters be signed, and many want a phone number for verification. Most papers insist on publishing the writer's name, but at least four have left a signature off in such matters as rape or AIDS.

Under what circumstances, and with what frequency, do editors append an editor's note?

Nearly half the member papers report that they "never" or "rarely" do. The most common reasons for doing it are (1) to clarify an error of fact, or a misrepresentation, and (2) to tell the writer's background or special circumstances. Other reasons include: to note that the letter has been superseded by events; to acknowledge an error; to clarify the paper's position or procedure; to stand by a story; to answer the reader's question. Every newspaper seems to have decided that this is no place for rebuttals.

Some Recent Rejects From the Public Pulse

Public Pulse:

When the World-Herald is called on the carpet for unfair reporting it is denied. I would like to know why the World-Herald thought it was newsworthy to report every bad thing that happened to Mike Boyle's family, but evidently it was not newsworthy when then Police Chief Robert Wadman's son was involved in major vandalism at a school, a theft of $200, and ticketed for a minor in possession of alcohol? Is there a logical explanation? Why is one public figure's family crucified in the press, and another public figure's family indiscretions totally ignored?

Stephanie Gruber

Dear Public Pulse,

In response to the editorial and letters in the Public Pulse concerning Peter Citron: No one ever questioned his journalistic ability or his outgoing personality. What we do question is "did he fondle little boys."

Dorothy Starks

To the Public Pulse:

In response to the Public Pulse letters and corresponding editorial in defense of Peter Citron. I have never questioned his outgoing personality and warm journalistic touch. His column is not in question nor Peter's ability to sketch the story with the writer's pen.

According to the police report, Peter Citron is charged with two counts of fourth-degree sexual assault which is punishable (by) up to five years in prison and up to a $10,000 fine for each offense.

Trained professionals in the field of psychology will concur that victims of such inordinate adult behavior exhibit mental scarring far into their adult life.

Should Peter be guilty of these charges, the World-Herald would best reconsider the vehement blind defense of demeaning deviate behavioral disorder.

Daniel L. Gruber

We Absolutely Must Know Who Our Sources Are

by Frances Mendenhall

We were disappointed not to be able to make any use of a story that was interesting and well-written. Problem is, it came to us anonymously.

It was in the form of a letter, addressed to the Speaker of the Nebraska Legislature, and sent to the members of the Legislature, seven other state officials, and two other newspapers. It also bore a list of 43 "signers."

The letter was about the involvement of Sam Van Pelt, who is now conducting the Douglas County Grand Jury investigation of matters related to abuse allegations tied with the Franklin Credit Union. It had apparently been carefully written, with a great deal of background about what the writer(s) believed to be a cover-up of blame for the shooting death of Arthur Kirk in 1984, the investigation for which was conducted by Mr. Van Pelt.

The story was our kind of material, in that the material brought out was something people couldn't have known by reading the mainstream press. We wanted to get some background, check some sources with opposing points of view, and run at least some of the essay, with whatever was needed in the way of comment to keep the presentation fair.

The problem was, nobody wrote it. We called three of the first four signers (the fourth name was not legible). All refused to name the author or state what the signers had in common. They left us with the impression that in each case their having signed it was spur-of-the-moment, almost accidental.

So, as interesting as their case was, we were left with no choice but to file it away.

Interestingly enough, a similar conflict arose here earlier this month with former State Sen. John DeCamp. DeCamp was an early supporter of WHAMO, and last year helped us by contributing $1000 to our desktop publishing fund. DeCamp was angry that we had not published his memo with the five names of prominent people involved in the Franklin child abuse investigation. His letter was not tame, and he clearly had hoped that the alternative press, if everyone else let him down, would be courageous enough to step on the toes of the powerful.

It was another case of no attribution. In a phone call, which may not have made peace, but for now at least made our point, I explained to him that his story may have been true, but we needed to know its source, or have otherwise convincing evidence that the charges were true.

Please, please, if you take a position, written spoken, or through John DeCamp, don't hide your identity or credentials! We cannot print it if we cannot check it out.

Country Pride Follow-Up

A recruit in John Boyd's "Don't Buy Country Pride" campaign had her letter to Bakers forwarded to the ConAgra Poultry Company. THey apparently are not prepared to deal with political protests down in El Dorado, Ark., only with unhappy chicken connoisseurs. She got a nice form letter in reply apologizing for her dissatisfaction. "...Human errors and/or slip-ups do happen..." according to the letter.

By way of apology for the destruction of Jobbers Canyon, ConAgra Poultry Company sent her a "check for $3.50 along with a small cookbook of prize winning chicken recipes with our compliments." She kept the cookbook.

The check was endorsed "Pay to PROUD," and will be donated to the current fundraising effort to cover the cost of arguing PROUD's case before the United States Supreme Court.

Thanks, ConAgra, for your less-than-generous donation.

PROUD needs about $3,500 to file with the Supreme Court. So, if 1,000 of you will complain to ConAgra and sign your $3.50 apology checks over to PROUD they'll have it made.

How We're Doing

This publication is in better shape than it ever has been before. I have always believed that morale was more important than money, and that certainly is true now. What I wish is that the impact we have could be larger.

It would be good if we could reach a larger audience, and someday, I hope to publish twice a month. That would be a huge step, and will be possible only when more people are involved to share the work. We do have some concrete needs. Here are some.

Volunteer Opportunities

We need a computer again. A kind person loaned us hers for six months, and it was a big help. What we need is an IBM compatible, XT or better.

Some other work assignments that could improve our prospects:

Circulation Drive Chair. Would involve working with volunteers, phoning, and some mailings. This is very important to us. If we could double our present paid circulation, other problems would diminish. We could pay respectable stipends to people (none of us is anywhere near making a living doing this and probably never will be), and attract advertisers. This would make publishing twice monthly a real possibility.

Ad Salesperson. This person would find and service ad accounts. There are people who believe in what we do, and wish to support it publicly. Others in their professional lives wish to increase their professional and business contacts with people whose outlook on life they share. I believe that it is possible to build up some support for the Observer.

Software Experts. We can always use help from people who know the programs we're using. If you use an IBM compatible to do more than word processing, consider sharing your skills with us.

Good Old Word of Mouth. The best way for us to grow has always been through people telling others about us. Our readers have done a great job here. Thank you, and please continue.

Publishing a newspaper exclusively with volunteer support has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. If you have the urge to get involved, do it. You might be overworked, but you won't be disappointed.

Observer Deadlines

The next issue of the Nebraska Observer will be published May 2. We must receive your story ideas by April17. Copy is due by April 24. Story ideas for the June issue are due May 15 Copy is due May 22.

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Current Social Security System Is Not Fully Funded

An Intergenerational Income Transfer System

by Wallace C. Peterson

"Pay-as-you-go." This is something you are going to hear a lot about since New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan dropped his big political bomb to roll back the January increase in the Social Security tax.

We may just be at the beginning of an historical debate over Social Security, a debate that in its intensity and controversy may rival the debates of of 1935 when the system was first created.

The controversy over Senator Moynihan's tax-cutting proposal, the arguments about the Social Security "surplus" and the Trust Funds, and the issue of "pay-as-you-go" echo arguments that have been with us over the system's 55-year history.

A bit of history is in order if we are to see truly what is involved now. When FDR's administration first proposed an old age pension system, the question immediately arose as to how would such a system work? FDR insisted that the program be self-financing, by which he meant that no money from the federal Treasury was to go directly into the system.

There were--and continue to be--two interpretations to the President's "self-financing" charge. It could be either "pay-as-you-go," or "pay-for-yourself."

A "pay-as-you-go" system meant that the sources of finance for the system had to be identified and earmarked for the benefits, and that taxes be enacted to achieve this. In "pay-as-you-go" current taxpayers pay for the benefits received by current retirees.

A"pay-as-you-go" system is essentially an intergenerational income transfer system. People now working pay for the benefits of the retired (and disabled). This is the essential nature of Social Security as it now exists.

A "pay-for-yourself" system is one in which each generation of participants pays for its own benefits. In such a system, each participant would make payments into a fund, out of which benefits would be paid at retirement. Such a system is said to be "fully-funded."

Because of the frequent and all too careless use of terms like "Trust Funds" in connection with Social Security, many persons no doubt believe that the existing system is truly "fully-funded." It is not.

Initially, the Social Security System was set up as a fully-funded system. This was in accord with FDR's dictum that it be self-financing. In 1939, however, amendments to the original act changed it to its present form, an integenerational transfer system. The first benefits under the system were paid in 1940.

Why the shift from a "pay-for-yourself," fully-funded system to a "pay-as-you-go," intergenerational transfer system? The reason is not hard to understand. A fully-funded system would require the accumulation of a trust fund so gigantic that the federal government might wind up owning most of the economy. The assumption here is that in a fully-funded system, the surpluses necessary to have such a system will be invested in the economy at large.

To understand this, consider these figures. Currently $2,279 billion of the federal government's total debt of $3,085 billion is held by individuals and business firms. Net interest on the debt is $176 billion. This is income going to those who hold the debt.

Consider also that total Social Security outlays (retirement, disability and Medicare) now total nearly $350 billion. Interest on the debt ($176 billion) is about 50% of the current costs for Social Security.

Now use your imagination. To have a fund that would pay in full for today's Social Security benefits, it would probably have to be at least twice as large as the current federal debt--something on the order of $6 trillion!

Where would such an enormous sum be invested? To put it into the obligations of the federal government, as is now required for any surplus in the Social Security accounts, would not make any sense. But to "invest" it in the private economy would mean, as FDR feared, that the federal government might wind up owning most of the economy.

So what is the "bottom line" in all this? Fully-funded is a concept that makes sense for a nation. Keep this in mind as the debate unfolds over Social Security.

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Preventive Health Program by Dr. Thomas Ruma

Thomas Ruma, MD, a pathologist at Immanuel Medical Center, will speak on "Who's In Charge of My Health? Diet and Lifestyle Changes that Prevent Disease and Prolong Life," at the Grainery Wholefoods Market, 74th and Main Sts., Ralston, April 25, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Admission is $3.

Dr. Ruma will discuss diet and lifestyle in the formation and prevention of heart disease and cancer, and will include information on taking responsibility for one's own health. The one-hour talk and slide presentation will be followed by a question-and-answer session.

For more information, call 593-7186.

Beautiful Lawns Can Be Maintained Safely

Part 2 of a two-part series on lawn care.
by Colleen Aagesen and Mary Fiscus

When Judi Burton took her two young daughters to a neighborhood park the summer of 1988, she noticed that the sandbox weeds which had been green and vigorous just the day before were suddenly brown and withered.

Suspecting pesticide use and aware that even herbicides are pesticides and classified as such by the EPA, Burton reported her findings to a neighborhood board member. (Burton lives in a Sanitary Improvement District outside Omaha -- a district with its own governing body, not yet incorporated into the city.) She asked if the lawn care company hired by the district was putting pesticides in the sandboxes. The answer was yes.

"My littlest daughter ws 2 years old, and 2-year-olds put sand in their mouths! I couldn't believe they were actually putting herbicides in our sand!"

Burton's observation and follow-up produced good results. The board member to whom she complained was sympathetic and quickly introduced a resolution to stop spraying herbicides in the sandboxes. Today volunteers in Burton's neighborhood keep weeds out of sandboxes the old-fashioned way. They pull them.

Linda Rivard was playing with her children at an Omaha city park the summer of 1989 when she saw a lawn care truck pull up and its driver begin to spray the weeds along a fence and directly around a swing set. After a hasty exit with her children, Rivard called the Omaha Parks and Recreation Department and asked what they were spraying.

"'Round-up,' they told me. When I asked them why, they said they didn't want any weeds to grow. I told them *children* play around there -- that this makes me very angry!"

Later Rivard called the Mayor's Action Line, but her call was not returned. Since that incident, Rivard scans the parks for clues of recent pesticide use -- clues such s curled dandelions and odors she can sometimes recognize. Occasionally Rivard skips the parks altogether and keeps her children in their own safe and natural back yard.

Keeping Play Areas Untainted

Although urban Nebraskans may not have to worry that their children's play areas are contaminated by airborne malathion as do the unfortunate residents of the Medfly-targeted region of Los Angeles, neither can Nebraskans assume that their children's playgrounds, sandboxes and soccer fields are pesticide-free.

Since the now billion-dollar lawn care industry was launched in the late '60s, lawn care is no longer the domain of do-it-yourselfers. Government buildings, businesses, busy homeowners all can employ the services of lawn care companies. Protecting yourself and children who are too young to protect themselves is not an easy task.

If you are already a customer of a lawn care company, there are some safeguards you can take. First ask your lawn care company if it can skip the pesticides entirely and give you a program of fertilizers only. ChemLawn now offers such a program. If problems with weeds and pests develop, there are resources such as the Rodale Press in Emmaus, Pa., and the Necessary Catalouge out of New Castle, Va., that specialize in organic alternatives. Ask your lawn care specialist, even if his company's approach is chemical rather than organic, if he will work with you to have that nice lawn in the least toxic way.

You may also want to take a course in natural lawn care yourself.

Dealing With Pesticide Drift

Protecting yourself from someone else's use of lawn pesticides is not easy. Elaine Sabin, a Bellevue resident, said, "I can go to restaurants and sit in the non-smoking section and be protected from second-hand smoke. But in my own neighborhood there is nothing to protect me from pesticide drift."

Sabin first became interested in pesticide reform when she took an organic gardening class at Fontenelle Forest, where she served as a teacher-naturalist. "Before that course, we sprayed our trees and got out the 2,4-D for the dandelions," said Sabin.

Today Elaine and her husband, Bob, are members of NCAMP (National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides). They frequently give programs on pesticide dangers, as well as the natural alternatives. If your neighbor's lawn, place of business, child's school or soccer field is being treated with pesticides, Elaine said, you have every right to confront them with this important health issue. "If that means going to the school board, then do it," she said.

If your neighbor is not responsive to your concerns, Elaine said, then watch for the lawn care truck that comes to their house and call the company yourself. "The lawn companies have been very cooperative about notifying me ahead of time when they are going to spray my neighbors' lawns," she said. (Many Omaha-area lawn care companies also serve Council Bluffs and eastern Iowa where they are required by law to notify adjacent neighbors who request it. They are also accustomed to putting up lawn markers -- those little 4-inch-by-5-inch placards on a stick that tell you the lawn has been treated -- which are required in Iowa and often done as a courtesy in Nebraska.)

Help for citizens interested in statewide lawn care reform is available from NCAMP out of Washington, D.C. NCAMP is a coalition of regional "alternative to pesticide" and "reduction of pesticide" groups from around the country. One practical resource from NCAMP is a series of Chemical Fact Sheets about any pesticide in question, which NCAMP will send the consumer on request. These fact sheets explain acute and suspected chronic effects, as well as EPA findings and the results of such studies as the National Cancer Institute study that linked the use of 2,4-D to the development of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in Kansas farmers.

NCAMP toxicologist Catherine Karr suggests that lawn care groups meet with agricultural groups. "It's their water, too. We need to build bridges," she said.

Karr said Nebraskans need to show their lawmakers what other states are doing. In Iowa, for example, anyone applying pesticides as a paid service must be a certified applicator. An unlicensed commercial applicator can't even put down a granular fertilizer if there is a pesticide built into it. (In Nebraska only one person in the lawn care company has to be certified.) The law in Connecticut requires that all commercial applicators be knowledgable in Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a philosophy which tries to reduce the need for pesticides.

Organic, Chemical and IPM: What are the Differences?

Organic lawn care maintains a chemical-free approach. Even the fertilizers are not synthetic, but combinations of such nitrogen sources as blood meal and feather meal. The philosophy of natural lawn care is that the lawn is a grass garden and that healthy grass will crowd out the weeds. Organic lawn care specialists pay very close attention to proper mowing, watering and aerating.

One simple aerating technique, according to John Firakoski, owner of Nature's Way, an organic lawn care service, is to pull a weed. "It lets the oxygen in," he said. Firakoski is selective about his clients. "If they just expect me to control weeds, I won't even sign them on. There are 100-plus other companies in Omaha who can do that," he said.

So what does Fiarkoski ask of his customers? He expects you to clean your yard

Continued next page

Growing Free of Chemicals: Trends in Lawn Care

More laws

Following the leads of such states as New York, Iowa, Connecticut, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Rhode Island, more laws are expected in such areas as sign-posting, advance notification, consumer information, applicator training, and certification, including IPM training, record keeping, and poison reporting.

More organic lawn care companies Fiarkoski's own business increased tenfold last year. Hron said that organic lawn care companies are growing in number especially on the East and West Coasts.

Pesticide-free choices

In 1989 ChamLawn introduced a pesticied-free program of fertilizizers only, which they called their "all-nutrient" program. It is also their least expensive program.

Lawn care industry moving toward IPM Specialists from all three approaches agreed. Fech said that there were even workshops on the business and marketing aspects of IPM held in March at Iowa State.

More native grasses planted

Hron and Fiarkoski said that in Nebraska more buffalo grass and blue gramma grasses will be planted. These grasses are more drought-resistant than Kentucy bluegrass and can better withstand disease, thus reducing pesticide use.

Beneficial insects

"We are hearing more and more about this," said Fech. Hron said he successfully used the nematod parasite last year for grubs in his garden. Research reported from the Bio-Integral Center out of Berkeley, California expressed optimism that nematod technology will eventually become adopted by the lawn care industry.

Smaller Lawns, larger outdoor rooms Sabin said that a look at the latest home and garden magazines show that the poanting of trees, shrubs, native plants, and flowers is "in." The lawn we have grown accustomed to wanting is "out," as new outdoor spaces are being landscaped. Saabin said that the advantages to this are that more water is conserved and there is not so much yard waste. She said some homeowners now have their lawn down to so small a size that they can use their hand mower again!

Fr. Ritter Got Too Big For Humble Franciscans

by Colman McCarthy

WASHINGTON--Giovanni Francesco Bernadone, the 13th-century Italian soldier who gave up warmaking to serve the poor and became St. Francis of Assisi, advised his followers to avoid money, power and fame. After that, do it twice as hard.

For a time, America's favorite Franciscan was Father Bruce Ritter. Like the founder of his order, the priest reached out to the scorned and wretched. In 1969, he took in homeless kids, most of them runaways barely surviving on New York's streets: They came to his East Greenwich Village tenement apartment. When the flow increased, he founded Covenant House near Times Square. It would quickly become both a legend and a beacon.

Now, after months of publicity over allegations of sexual liaisons, shady money deals and favoritism, Ritter has resigned as director of his organization. Recently, new charges about a secret trust fund of nearly $1 million and payments of $350,000 in contract fees to relatives placed Ritter still further away from the Franciscan spirit that was part of his early appeal.

The priest is the latest in a wide pew of high-rolling reverends who, with computerized donor lists for electronic panhandling, access to politicians and CEOs, and a media given over to press agentry, turn out to have feet of clay, plus legs, upper trunk and arms, too. Americans, with a national penchant for hero worship, had in Ritter a model for something higher: saint worship.

A 1981 front-page story in the Wall Street Journal took everything that Ritter said as gospel. By then, he was well into major fund-raising, taking both foundation and government money, along with the widow's mite. The $12 million budget in 1981 would rise to $85 million by the end of the decade. Every tax-deductible nonprofit organization with an income over $25,000 is required by the IRS to provide a financial statement to anyone asking for it.

Maybe all was well during the build-up years, maybe not. Who was checking--staff people earning over $90,000? Ritter's operation in 1988 was nearly twice the size of the federal government's funding for runaway-youth programs, except no General Accounting Office was on hand to monitor what happened to money sent in by 650,000 donors. While Ritter passed the hat, an unquesting media usually passed the buck.

Much of the secular press has trouble holding popular priests to standards routinely applied to other public figures. Religion, like entertainment, can be a business of appearances. It shouldn't be a sacrilege to look at one of the haloed and wonder, If we give him a free ride will we end up being taken for a ride?

Ritter was a favorite of Ronald Reagan. In 1984, the President stationed the priest in the gallery for the State of the Union address and had him take a bow as an "unsung hero." The next year Ritter signed on as a member of Edwin Meese's commission on pornography, taking a hard line against homosexuality that the Reagan-Meese claque found a blessing. George Bush toured Covenant House last November, shortly after Georgetown Universit conferred an honorary degree on Ritter.

Ritter signed on as a member of Edwin Meese's commission on pornography, taking a hard line against homosexuality that the Reagan-Meese claque found a blessing.

If the political right was thanking the Lord for a man known as the rector of the runaways, so was the religious right. Such Catholic money men as J. Peter Grace, the billionaire chemical CEO, and William Simon, the Treasury sescretary under Richard Nixon, became Covenant House angels.

Although not frequent, it is common enough in Catholic religious orders that members become untethered to the community after hearing the applause of secular society. Instead of staying on their knees, they stay on their toes--for the big donation, the fatter grant and the splashier promo. In the mid-1960's, the novel, "Morte D'Urban," a national book-award winner by J.F. Powers, was the tale of a religious-order priest who was snared not by wine, women or song but by the thrills of fund-raising.

Ritter, who denies all charges of wrongdoing, became too big for the humble Franciscans. He was also beyond the control of another group--social workers who ran programs for runaways. They criticized his establishing large-size, not small, shelters, and then locating them in prostitution zones. That, said a runaway-youth official in a 1983 federal survey, is like using a tavern for a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Bruce RItter, whose mass-mail fund-raising letters were models of unction speaking of God's mercy toward "His kids whom He loves so much," brought in gobs of money. He knew how to tug the heartstrings. His troubles came with purse strings.

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Some Lawn Care Methods Guaranteed Not to Choke You Up

Continued from previous page

in early spring and reseed any bare spots. Raise your mower height in the summer and never remove more than 40 percent of the grass blade height. Allow your lawn clippings to remain on the lawn at least every other mowing. "They are a good source of nitrogen," he said. He asks that you water correctly -- heavily once a week or so, not lightly and frequently -- so that a good root system develops.

What will Firarkoski do for you? First, he will give your lawn treatments that you and your children can walk on immediately after application. He will also take half-a-dozen soil samples and have them professionally analyzed to determine what nurients are missing. He will sub-contract with an aerator if your lawn needs aerating. He will arrange for your lawn to be dethatched if thatch has built up. (Thatch is a layer of thickly-matted dead roots and decaying tissue between the soil and the grass. More than .5 inch will make the turf prone to injury. A careful power-raking will break thatch up.) Then Firarkoski will put down a slow-releasing blend of natural fertilizers and nutrients designed to bring the soil to the right PH level. He puts down one application in the spring and one application in the fall.

Contrast this with most chemical lawn care companies which put down an average of five to six applications (including herbicides and insecticides) each year.

Intergrated Pest Management (IPM) is a middle approach between the chemical approach and the organic one, according to John Fech, Douglas County Extension horticulturist. Like the organic approach, IPM emphasizes proper mowing, aerating and watering. But whereas organic lawn care abstains from the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, IPM uses pesticides as tools when needed with the goal of reducing their need.

Comparing Local Companies

The Douglas County Extension Library is filled with resources reflecting all three approaches. "The Ortho Problem-Solver," for example, details the chemical approach. "Rodale's Landscape Problem-Solver" outlines the organic approach. The Douglas County Extension's own publication, "Intergrated Pest Management: A Common Sense Approach to Lawn Care," is a pamphlet consumers are welcome to keep.

Fech said IPM is the prefered approach. He promotes IPM through what he calls "healthy lawn tips," which he gives in speeches, workshops, a Cox Cable show, public service announcements and newsletters.

But even with the Douglas County Extension Office advocating the IPM approach, a random check of 10 Omaha lawn care companies suggest that the word is not out.

For example, the IPM approach is to put down insecticides when there is a insect *problem.* The Extension office's definition of a grub problem is a situation where there are more than three to five grubs per square foot in more than one spot. The Douglas County Extension Office does not believe in insecticides as prophylatics.

Yet even ChemLawn, an industry leader, puts down insecticides routinely in one of its programs, according to Tim Corbett, ChemLawn manager. Gary Struyk, owner of Struyk Turf, concurred. "In these parts you *have* to put down insecticide. Now if you were in Des Moines, that would be different," he said.

Doug Carlson, Barefoot Lawns manager, disagreed. "I don't like to see insecticides *or* weed-killers put down on a lawn unless there is a problem."

Other big differences among Omaha lawn care companies included certification and staff education. In some companies, all of the applicators were certified, in others as few as one had certification. Although Steve's Yard Care would receive high marks for educating his *customers* (Steve Kozol puts out a flier each year with common-sense hints on such practices as mowing and watering), Kozol and his employees recieve most of their education from the chemical dealers. Struyk and Barefoot, on the other hand, are examples of lawn care companies who regularly send their employees to IPM workshops at the Douglas County Extension Office, as well as UNL, Iowa State and the University of Iowa.

Fech said the interest in IPM is growing and is the industry's response to a society that is becoming more enviornmentally aware. "Like parents who no longer give their children aspirin because of the link to Reyes Syndrom, more and more people are wanting the least toxic pest management. They don't want to just spray and pray," he said.

Natural Lawn Care Course Offered April 1

Tony Hron, Omaha landscape architect, will teach a course called "Natural Lawn Care" April 1 at the Omaha Yoga and Bodywork Center, 6105 Maple, from 1 to 5 p.m. The cost is $18 for members, $20 for non-members. Topics include how to make the switch from chemical to organic lawn care, how to improve soil health, proper fertilizing, seeding-over and the use of new seed varieties.

Free Enterprise Frees Some to Shun Responsibility

by Norris Alfred

Free enterprise is a trigger phrase, often voiced by those critical of government regulation and was used by a critic of the stuff written in this column in denouncing my ridicule of the Laffer Curve. So be it. I thank him for the criticism because it opens up the thought chamber of another economic rationale. This particular flow of thought has to do with the trigger word, eeThe economic definition given "free" by critics of government regulation includes irresponsibility.

This is true because what has happened during the 19th and 20th centuries and, particularly, during the past 50 years, has been a deleterious degradation of the environment for which no corporation or other form of free enterprise is willing even to admit responsibility, let alone assume it.

President Reagan, during his eight years in the White House, not only encouraged deregulation (get government off our backs), he actively pursued a course of weakening or outright ending regulatory agencies and commissions wherever he had the authority. One of the results of all this has been the growing FSLIC scandals.

Without having researched it, or attempted to maintain a file on the development, the assertion can be made with some validity that the junk bond market was one of the results of deregulation. Junk bonds paid high rates of interest and this attracted the managers and owners of "thrifts: (what an incongruous description that is) and many of them invested heavily in those bonds. After all, there was no regulation (or at least one that was enforced) that said they couldn't take depositors' money and, in the name of free enterprise, do whatever they wanted with it. Some of them built fancy homes with all the luxuries; paid themselves huge salaries and annual bonuses. They bought political influence by making big donations to PACs and candidates' campaigns.

Why did these characters prove to be lacking in fiscal responsibility? There was, and still is, one big reason why those managing and those overseeing management (the board members of individual thrifts) felt free to take big risks with money that wasn't theirs -- the federal government insured those deposits.

If the deregulators had abolished the Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation, perhaps there wouldn't have been so many of these "thrift" institutions going belly-up and causing a drain on the U.S. Treasury. But abolishing the FSLIC wouldn't have been popular, and popularity is the name of the political game in 1990, just as it has been since 1980.

Federally insured deregulation is a contradiction in terms. It certainly didn't "get government off the backs of the taxpayers," since it is taking taxpayers' money to pay off the innocent depositors, who discovered their savings had disappeared in irresponsible risk investments by the owners and managers of "thrifts." The quotes around the last word of that sentence emphasize the ridiculousness of the description.

For the past 10 years deregulation has also resulted in de-emphasis of responsibility. Combine political popularity (defined by the polls) with a television campaign of "sound bites" (how those listening to the Lincoln-Douglas debates would hoot and holler at that description!) and political campaigning has degenerated into a beauty contest, based on appearance and the ability to act sincere.

The precepts of democratic government are based on individual worth and that worth is based on individual responsibility. After 10 years of irresponsible, democratic government administration, the discovery is being made that there are many individuals who are not worth much.

When Charles Keating Jr., principal owner of the failed Lincoln Savings and Loan, was asked whether his contributions influenced politicians to intervene on his behalf, a delay now expected to cost taxpayers $2 billion, he responded, "I want to say in the most forceful way I can: I certainly hope so."

New Jobs' Real Price Tag: $7,715

Reprinted from the Lincoln Journal

A major feature of Kay Orr's re-election campaign will be her stress on sweeping 1987 tax changes put into place under her sponsorship. Those, the Republican chief executive repeatedly has claimed, have turned Nebraska around economically, i.e., in the Good Life State, there are now Good Times for all, or almost all.

What specifically won the trick, according to the governor, was, and is, the grating of major tax breaks to corporations or individuals creating jobs and upgrading plants or establishing operations in the state. This is called improving the business climate.

In raw numbers and without respect to salary levels, Orr's Revenue Department asserted that close to 15,000 new jobs have been created. Further, more than 6,000 additional jobs have already been indicated by interested corporations. In terms of overall investment thus far, real and potential, the administration is using a cumulative figure of 2.446 billion.

But what will all of that cost state government (and certain cities) in tax revenue waived as incentives? Even a rough idea of such an important assessment is impossible to discover from state Tax Commissioner John Boehm's latest annual report on the 1987 Employment and Investment Growth Act, also known as LB775.

Last year, Boehm's report to the Legislature included a projection that it wouldn't be until the very end of this century before the estimated economic gains stimulated by LB775 might first exceed its costs in taxes its costs in taxes surrendered. Such a forward look into the future unfortunately was absent from last week's accounting.

What it specifically did show is that only 45 companies had, as of Dec. 31, 1989, qualified for approved tax credits. Those tax credits, corporate and individual, totaled $46,786,492, or an average of slightly more than $1 million per company. The actual number of new jobs created by the 45 companies was 6,064.

A little easy math -- dividing certified jobs into known credits earned -- suggests $7,715 to be the speculative tax "cost" of each new job logged thus far.

Whether that's a good deal or a bad deal is a matter of interpretation. And politics. Obviously the Orr administration deems the cost-benefit ratio positively.

The Revenue Department's extracurricular effort last week to divide only tax credits already paid out ($14 million of the $46.7 million) by estimated jobs created (nearly 15,000) so as to produce a theoretical tax cost of $950 per job is partisan and self-serving in the extreme. No respectable campaign material, verbal or written, would embody such rubbish.

In a related interview, Revenue Department spokesman Don Adams properly cautioned that not all LB775 corporations will use the maximum tax credits they earn through investment and job creation. Why not? Because, he said, their credit may be greater than their tax liabilities. That's another way of saying such corporations would be paying neither corporate income nor sales taxes for years. A better business climate than that you can hardly find.

Those Proliferating Sacks Can Now Be Recycled at Hy-Vee

Hy-Vee food stores will now pay customers $.05 each for up to six returned grocery sacks as part of a company environmental program. They already use sacks that are made partly with recycled paper and soon will start labelling recycled products with a green shelf tag.

--Sierra Club

Kansas Attorney General: No Sharing of N-Waste Liability

If Kansas attorney general Robert Stephan's opinion is correct, none of the four states in the nuclear waste compact with Nebraska will have to help pay claims or help clean up after an accident.

The 11th amendment of the U.S. Constitution guarantees states sovereign immunity from prosecution, and Stephan's opinion says there is no express waiver of the 11th amendment in the compact.

Raymond Peery, attorney and executive director for the Central Interstate Low-Level Radioactive Waste Commission, said shared liability is provided for in the compact.

Peery said that under compact law, Nebraska can get money to use for possible damages by charging whatever it thinks is necessary to cover any liability.

Nebraska State Sens. Sandy Scofield of Chadron and Spence Morrissey of Tecumseh issued a memorandum with a copy of the opinion to other senators.

In the memo, the senators wrote: "We are convinced, now more than ever, that LB1232, which would direct Nebraska's Commissioner to seek shared liability as it is spelled out in the bill, needs to be passed this session."

The bill, introduced by Scofield, would not allow the issuance of a license for construction or operation of the waste facility unless all compact states add shared liability language to the compact law.

Morrissey said the opinion is proof that "there's resistance to adding shared liability language to the compact."

Computers and Ballot Security: Could an Election Be Stolen?

of the American Bar Association. By means of computer fraud employees have raised their salaries and students have raised their grades. Caltech students printed out more than a million entry blanks for a McDonald's contest and won a Datsun station wagon. Employees of a federal agency diverted tens of thousands of dollars to nonexistent employees. In the infamous 1973 Equity Funding Corporation fraud, company officials and other employees typed into their computers names of about sixty-four thousand people who didn't exist as holders of more than two billion dollars' worth of life-insurance policies that didn't exist but were "resold" to reinsurers. "Electronic dead souls," the writer Thomas Whiteside has called these fabricated customers.

Given the intensity of feelings about winning and losing elections, it seems reasonable to assume that whatever can be done sooner or later will be done.

Ways to Steal an Election

Doomsdayers have come up with a number of methods of computer election theft.

One way would be a loop in the source code that would not activate until after a certain number of votes had been counted, thus bypassing detection by any of the "test decks" that were run before election night. Another variation on this would be a program that would not run except on the night of the election; one computer specialist I spoke with considers this an impossibility for the AIS machines since they do not have internal clocks. There are many possibilities for reducing risk of detection; a system could kick in only if the favored candidate were behind, for instance. Or if certain precincts were especially likely to be selected for recounting, they could be avoided.

Even if the source code was not altered internally by someone in the industry, it is possible that there are trap doors in the code, pathways that normally lie dormant but can be activated to alter the count. Some consider it possible that a specially prepared ballot could itself contain a Trojan Horse that could change the count. I asked Wayne Nunn how the industry could assure that this was not possible. "I don't think they could, without giving you access to the source code," he said.

The ballot used in the AIS system contains a total of eight columns of slots for marks, and there are thirty-six spots per column that can be marked and read by the scanner. On each side, three of the columns are for voter selections. On the front of the ballot there are two additional columns of black rectangles which tell the scanner when to read or not to read and identify ballot type and precinct, giving eight total. A typical ballot will show ten or so possible places to mark in each column (see illustration). But the scanner reads the entire column, and the marks outside what the ballot asks for could theoretically be used to activate a Trojan Horse. The problem, is of course, that there would be the evidence of the ballot itself, so the crime would not be invisible, although the perpetrator might be hard to track. Wayne Nunn considers this a possibility even in AIS' system, given the prevalence of viruses. "It is difficult to prove that a program does not have a Trojan Horse," said Nunn. "They can modify, execute, and then change back," without being detected, he said. Michael Shamos does not consider it likely. "The technology is too crude; it couldn't work," he said.

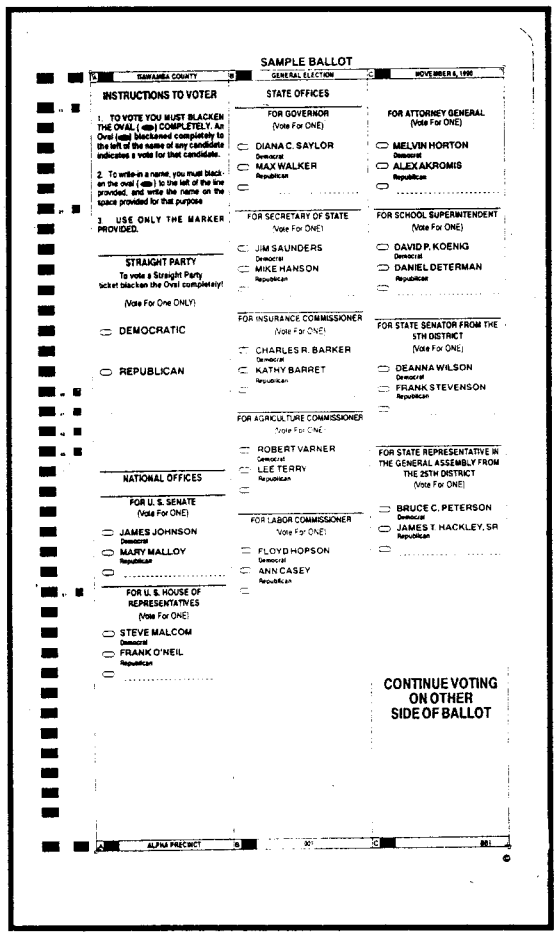
Worst Case

Counties that do not do a random selection of precincts for hand counting after elections are still vulnerable to computer election rigging. Presently, such counting is done in Douglas County, but it is not mandated by law. If different people were appointed to the offices of Election Commissioner and Deputy Election Commissioner, it is conceivable that this practice could change, unless our laws are written to require random hand counting.

At present, for computer election fraud to take place in Douglas county, collaboration between the two election commissioners (they are of opposite political party) and at least one person who has control over the source code, such as someone at AIS. This scenario seems very unlikely.

But things can change. There is no reason to presume that the same people will always be in charge at AIS, or at the Election Commissioner's office. It is impossible to determine whether the World-Herald has or will have direct involvement in AIS. "We do not yet have an equity position in that company," said the paper's new publisher, John Gottschalk. Neither Gottschalk nor AIS people were willing to say how likely or when they might, although Gottschalk described it as an option, and "at our election." Gottschalk described the paper's stock option as a debenture bond. Urosevich denied that there was a debenture bond.

Since neither AIS nor the World-Herald is a publicly traded company, we have to rely on information provided by insiders. What they have said is that the World-Herald owns part of an investment company called AIS Investors, Inc., which, according to Robert Urosevich, bought out two of the individual stockholders of AIS itself in 1987. Why does the Newspaper of the Midlands, whose growth plan targets information and advertising "from matchbook covers to billboards," want to own a company that counts votes for 8 to 9 percent of the nation's counties? "I hope you're not suspecting any nefarious motives," said Gottschalk. I simply recalled the obvious to him, that a reporter's job is to investigate.



A ballot used in the AIS system

Few Know of Herald's Involvement

In a way the most perplexing discovery I made in gathering facts for this article was how few people knew--or cared--that the Herald had an interest here. One election commissioner I spoke to brushed the question of ownership aside the first time I asked it, as if she didn't think it was important. When I brought it up later, she talked about it candidly. Steve Wiitala, former Election Commissioner, refused to respond to my question "who owns the company?" "I don't want to be quoted in your paper on this," he said in a phone interview. Only one person, Mike Boyle, who was himself the Election Commissioner when the system was purchased, was direct with me. "It use to be a good system, but the World-Herald bought (AIS), so now I don't know," he said. Boyle is a candidate for governor. My conversation with him was very brief.

Modernizing the Statutes

Optical scanners offer fewer chances for election fraud than do many other computer systems. Because they provide a quick and reliable count, they are being used by more and more districts, which may be why the industry seemed like such a good investment opportunity for the World-Herald. They are not perfect, and their vulnerability lies in the invisibility of the potential crime, as well as the likelihood that few people would have to be involved.

Two approaches are needed to secure this system. One, the source code must be made more secure by mandating an audit by an independent agency such as National Bureau of Standards. Their function would be simply to assure that the program contained only what the vendor said it contained, no trap doors, no Trojan Horses. The source code should then be supplied to the local districts by the auditing agency rather than by the vendor.

Two, recounting procedures should be revised. The random selection of entire precincts for hand recounting should be required by law. There should also be more recount options for the candidate, who now has no say in which precincts ought to be subject to a hand count. Another option for candidates would be a cheaper way to do a recount. Presently, the candidate must now pay for an entire recount unless it is statutorily mandated; the candidate should be allowed to select certain precincts, pay for those recounts, and then decide whether the expense of continuing the recount is justified.

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May 13, 12-3

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Carter Team Promoted Fair Nicaraguan Election

by Richard Flamer

The author is an Omaha art dealer who went to Nicaragua to observe the elections last month.

The Council of Freely-Elected Heads of Government, part of the Carter Center at Emory University, was formed at a Carter Center consultation in 1986 to encourage the participation of democratic leaders in addressing the issues of democracy, conflict, human rights and economic crisis in the region. The council is comprised of 12 former and current democratic heads of government representing many of the countries throughout this hemisphere. Last year the Council served as an official observer for the Panamanian elections, and is currently observing the presidential election process in Panama and Nicaragua.

The Center has been host to a number of high-level consultations of interest to the region such as "The Debt Crisis: Adjusting to the Past of Planning for the Future?" (April 1986) and "Reinforcing Democracy in the Americas" (November 1986).

That said, the real function of the unit is to bring the enormous pressure to bear for the free election of heads of government into the political process of emerging democracies. For Nicaragua, the effort was incredibly successful.

The initial work of the Carter Group began more than a year ago when the elections in Nicaragua were first announced as a result of the Central American Peace Accords. A small team from the Carter Center was dispatched (headed by Dr. Jennifer McCoy) for Managua to begin monitoring the pre-electoral process and to write reports weekly back to the Carter Center. The early published reports from the Carter Center began appearing in October 1989, fully six months before the election. In those reports, the Carter team suggested ways that the pre-electoral process could be more fair.

Daniel Ortega (left), sans uniform, lent an air of dignity and decorum throughout the electoral process in Nicaragua. Violetta Chamorro de Barrios, right. Not only does she loook like Governor Orr, they share a common politic.

Those early reports from the Carter Center Team suggested, among other things, a non-partisan Supreme Electoral Council within the country and suggested that the power of that body be absolute for the electoral process (prior to this period, the SEC was highly partisan and was only advisory in nature). The Team's recommendations were followed (after talks between former President Jimmy Carter and President Daniel Ortega on the first official pre-election trip to Nicaragua).

As the pre-electoral process continued, President Carter began assembling a specific team of world leaders which included his co-host, the Honorable George Price, Prime Minister of Belize; Hon. Rafael Caldera, former president of Venezuela; Hon. Daniel Oduber, former president of Costa Rica. These people were not just figureheads but in fact had been specifically chosen for their impact on the region. All were not only respected in Nicaragua but had previously (or currently) dealt with the government on favorable terms.

Additionally, the Carter Center team selected a group of U.S. observers chosen for their non-partisan spectra. The U.S. delegation was headed by the Hon. Daniel Evans, former U.S. Senator and Governor of Washington but included Republicans and Democrats alike. Congressman Douglas Bereuter from Nebraska was probably chosen to fill out the slate for all views. The group of U.S. figures included Senators John Chafee, John Danforth, Chris Dodd, Patrick Leahy, Claiborne Pell, and Larry Pressler. From the House came David Bonior, Eltgon Gallegly, Ben Jones, Bill Richardson and Olympia Snowe. Most of the above served on committees that involved Foreign Affairs, Intelligence or International issues.

Cardinal Obando y Brovo, the cleric who talked the Pope into chiding Fr. Ernesto Cardenal for being involved in politics, at a rally for the Opposition Party, three days before the election.

The teams selected made various trips totalling six in number before the actual election of February 25th. On each of these highly publicized trips, the U.S. delegates were given free rein to criticize and comment with the results compiled and issued as a report. Again, the in-country team wrote the report and in most cases the reports were very successful in altering the pre-electoral process on methods of campaigning, etc.

Cardinal Obando y Brovo, the cleric who talked the Pope into chiding Fr. Ernesto Cardenal for being involved in politics, at a rally for the Opposition Party, three days before the election.

President Carter throughout all of this was keeping an active hand, consulting with the in-country team at least weekly and meeting with the major and minor political candidates on each trip to Managua. Rosalyn Carter, as an active participant, was additionally meeting with candidates, often splitting the load with her husband.

Two days prior to the election, the entire delegation came to Nicaragua to observe the actual elections. The Carter Center people in Managua had coordinated efforts with the other principal observer groups from the United Nations and the Organization of American States and agreed to spread the Carter Center people around the country.

As a result, each of the U.S. delegation members was assigned to a specific region around the Country with 2 other U.S. delegates and 2 staff members from the Managua Staff.

I had originally gone to see the work of Rep. Bereuter and so went to the section that he had been assigned, the state of Granada. (Unfortunately, he was reassigned to a more northern province on the morning of the elections when I was already in Granada.)

The teams within the province then began their visits on the morning of the elections. I followed the team from Granada for a couple of stops and their routine was wholly neutral,

Continued on next page

Nicaraguan Artists Learn From Omaha Sculptor

by Richard Flamer

On a recent trip to Nicaragua, I was asked by Bill Farmer, a fine Omaha sculptor, to deliver several small parcels to a sculpture studio in the city of Granada.

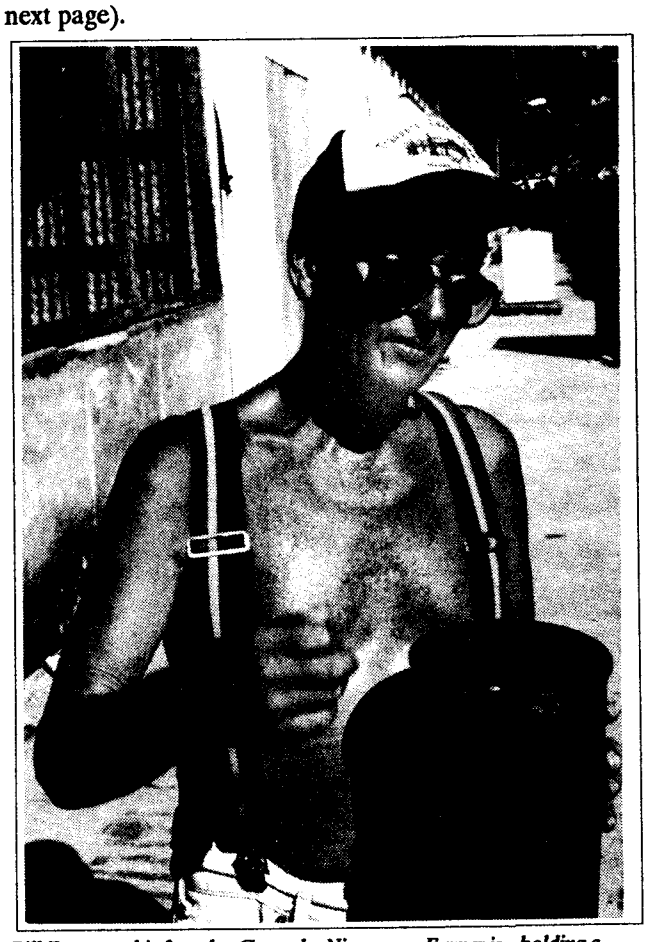
The project, developed and implemented by Bill, is located on the edge of town at the site of INTECNA (an industrial arts school). The sculpture studio was begun with two apprentice sculptors from Nicaragua who had previously only worked in stone and found objects. With Bill's support they learned to expand their range to include advance methods in metal.

The studio, on the days of my visit, had a kiln for melting and casting bronze or aluminum. The facility had an entire cabinet of tools that included everything from rasps to buffers (tools are very difficult to find in a country suffering from a commercial embargo from the U.S.). On the nearby benches were vises, plaster for casting and many works in progress.

Luis and Carlos were the two young men I met when I first visited. In the studio, however, were three other men who were also working. Luis and Carlos were now working with their own students and expanding the facilities. The shop was filled with completed works that ranged from the abstract to the figurative (including a wonderful fiberglass woman who was lying in a hammock when I first walked in).

The two large drums which had originally held the tools sent down by Bill were near the tool cabinet. They bore the address of Peter Marchetti, a former Omahan who is now a Jesuit at the University of Central America in Managua. I couldn't help but think of the other two barrels which had been sitting on Bill's front porch when I left -- those also nearly filled with tools and materials for the project. The tools came from Bill's own workshop and from money he'd raised along the way.

Bill will be heading back down to Nicaragua and his project in May to continue with his work. A fundraiser for Bill's trip and his studio is scheduled for April 8 (see ad, next page).



Bill Farmer at his foundry, Granada, Nicaragua. Farmer is holding a shell, one of few sources of metal available for casting.

Letters

Schmit Was Right All Along, Rest Had Head in Sand

Dear Dr. Mendenhall:

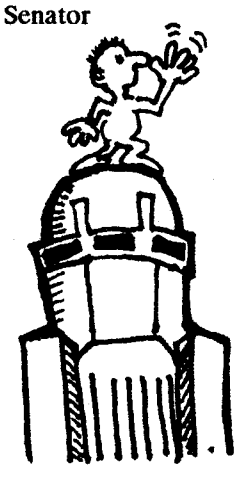
Thank you for your letter of Feb. 23. I only have one additional comment, which I must make. It is obvious that all my previous efforts to inform you are wasted.

In the third paragraph, the third line, you indicate that public institutions, including the Legislature's Special Committee, "dropped the ball and that only a handful of fringe media types and Ft. Calhoun foster mothers kept the issue alive at all." If you believe that and if you insist upon repeating that bunk, then you must have committed to the idea that those who would have destroyed the committee really are telling you what to say.

I have never deviated from my original course. The fact that you, and others like you, attempted to try to convince the public that such was true is irresponsible on your part. The fringe media type and the Ft. Calhoun foster mothers have been around for a long time. It was only when I introduced the resolution in the Legislature, secured the support for the committee and pursued the evidence that Grand Juries began to look at the evidence and now one individual has been arrested. I do not expect you can ever point out in your publication that Schmit was right all along and the rest of you had your head in the sand, but at least you should stop telling the lie that the committee ceased to function because a few persons resigned.

I really believe that the sad state of affairs which exists in Douglas County today would never have developed if the news media had been alert and if that same media would have treated everyone alike. It is true that the World-Herald dominates news coverage of this state, but there are a multitude of other opportunities to inform the public which are frequently not utilized. I believe we will agree on one issue and that is the rich, the powerful and influential, if they break the law, need not fear the same degree of public exposure as do the less fortunate.

Sincerely,
Loran Schmit
State Senator



Reader Asks 'Why Bad-Mouth ConAgra?'

Dear Ms. Mendenhall:

I sometimes read your paper, The Nebraska Observer! But, the article of Feb. 28, 1990 by John Boyd, "The Politics of Chicken... or Parts Isn't Parts," made me sad. I cannot understand why a writer such as John Boyd would use your newspaper to "badmouth" ConAgra, even though he may be very unhappy, personally, with some person in ConAgra or the company itself.

I began my career with Armour in 1954. Unloaded carloads of meat products for processing, worked at the processing plant slicing bacon and manufacturing hams, loaded trucks, and many other duties with Armour labor to serve customers and consumers. Armour manufactured prime products way back then, and still does.

We became a part of ConAgra, with the Armour acquisition, in 1983. At first, we were nervous moving 70 or 80 families to Omaha, becoming a part of ConAgra. Many of us left our children behind who had found places in the business world, and moved to our job opportunities. We did not know much about Omaha, but, being in the meat business, we heard it was a packinghouse town.

We found Omaha and its people to be a mighty fine place to live. My wife and I enjoy the community, and we enjoy our work at Armour and as partners with ConAgra. For this reason, I find Mr. Boyd's vendetta very disturbing. I cannot believe that The Nebraska Observer is the place for Mr. Boyd to try and "beat up on" upstanding leaders in the community such as ConAgra associates and Jack Baker.

Maybe I don't understand John Boyd's objectives!

Very truly yours,
B.J. Powdrill

Editor's note to Mr. Powdrill: You may have noticed the spoof on "ConJob" in the centerfold of this issue. The article has Boyd's fingerprints all over it and should give you some idea what moves him. Many people who agree with Boyd are our subscribers (we live on subscriptions), so we plan to keep printing his point of view. But we will also print yours even if you do not subscribe.

Carter Team Assured Fair Election

Continued from previous page

stopping to chat with the party observers at each of the polling places, chatting with voters after they had voted and so on. In all, the teams visited not only the cities put an observer team (U.N. OAS or Carter Center.) visited all but 60 hamlets in the entire country at least once on election day.

The results of the observers actions were collated and assembled and presented at the close of the elections with a speech by President Carter the following day. But the work of the Carter Team was not yet over.

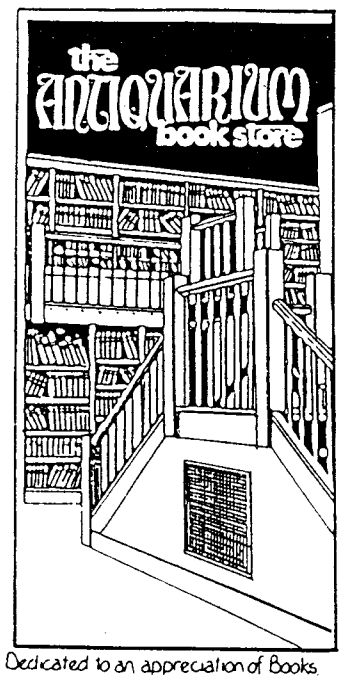
President Carter was forthright in declaring free elections and a belief in the process of democracy in Nicaragua. Additionally, he was eager to spread the word holding numerous press conferences at every stage of the political process.

One of the vehicles purchased with some of the $9 million sent by the U.S. through the "non-partisan National Endowment for Democracy.

The In-country team, after the delegates had left, continued to monitor the vote counts, etc. They will stay within the country until the peaceful transition of power has been accomplished and will issue reports on a regular basis regarding the post electoral process, as well.

The entire process, albeit complex, is a new-found tool for Democracy. in being able to witness the different phases of the process of Jimmy Carter's Center I truly felt blessed. In a world of recriminations and political posturing, the work of an honest man, now in a position to speak forthrightly, seems to have an incredible power. Every Nicaraguan that I talked to knew of jimmy Carter. Every villager knew of the work of Jimmy Carter in ensuring a free election. The people that I encountered from other parts of Latin America all knew of the work of the Carter Center Team.

Although I did not get a chance to meet with Rep. Bereuter, I did have occasion to speak with both Sen. Chris Dodd and Sen. Pat Leahy who were equally vocal about the magnificent role of President Carter in the electoral process.



Dedicated to an appreciation of Books
Art coffee and Conversation

Drawings and Notes from Nicaragua

by BILL FARMER

The Antiquarium Galleries will host a fundraiser to continue the helping-hand work being done by Bill Farmer in Nicaragua.

Bill returned from Central America in December. He has been teaching the locals how to set up and operate foundries to afford them the ability to cast bronze. The foundry setup has been costly and there remains work to be done. Bill plans to return in April or May to continue his work. Funds are being solicited to assist this project. The event will include readings from his notes, display of his drawings, a buffet, beverages and music. A minimum contribution of twenty dollars per couple is requested. The drawings and sketches will be for sale. Proceeds will go to further the project.

APRIL 8th
3–7 p.m.

1215 HARNEY STREET
OMAHA

Art Calendar

Information

New Joslyn Buffet Hours
Starting April 1 the Joslyn Gallery Buffet will be open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Sundays from 1 to 3 p.m.

Chicago Monet Reservations
Advance tickets for "Monet in the '90s: The Series Paintings," which will be on view at the Art Institute of Chicago May 19 - August 12, are now on sale. Advance tickets are recommended and are available at TicketMaster outlets. They may be ordered by phone with a major credit card at (312) 559-0200. Tickets are $5 for Monday-Thursday; $6 Friday-Sunday. There is a service charge for TicketMaster orders.

Gallery Listings

Antiquarium Gallery,
1215 Harney Street, Omaha,
341-8077
March 30: Deco Crap Juried Competition. An excuse for an opening get-together and party for artists, friends and supporters.

Artists' Cooperative Gallery
405 So. 11th Street, Omaha,
342-9617
Hours: Wed.-Thurs. 11- 5; Fri. & Sat. 11-10; Sunday noon - 5.

Bellevue College Gallery
Galvin Road at Harvell Drive, Bellevue,
293-3732
Hours: 8-9:30 M-F; 9-5 Sat.; 1-5 Sun.
April 4 - May 4: Fourth Annual Metro Seniors Show.

Bemis New Gallery
614 So. 11th, Omaha,
341-7130
Hours: 11-5 daily.
Through April 1: "Raw," rough drawings from the studio, work by past and present Bemis resident artists.
April 7 - May 6: Michael Sarich. *April 8:* Pillow concert at 3 p.m. with Telos String Quartet. *April 12:* Thursday Night Lecture Series with Bertille deBaudiniere of France, Christina Narwicz of New York, and Maggie Ellen Tobin of Nebraska. *April 24:* Pillow Concert at 8 p.m. with Carmelo Galante/ Jim Compton & Friends, Chamber Music.

Burkholder Project
719 P Street, Lincoln
477-3305
Hours: 10-5 Monday thru Saturday
Jeanette Richstatter

Creighton Fine Arts Gallery
Creighton University
27th and California, Omaha
280-2509
Hours: 8:30-4, Mon. - Fri.; 10-4 Saturday; noon-4 Sunday.
Through April 13: Johanna Marcil (paintings) and Richard Rymill (sculpture).
April 18: 7-9 p.m. Opening Reception for Swinerton and Yu show.
April 18-29: Leslie Swinerton and Sau-Ling Yu BFA Thesis show.

Gallery 72
2709 Leavenworth, Omaha
345-3347
March 16 - April 7: John Himmelfarb mixed works.

Garden of the Zodiac
Old Market Passageway,
1042 Howard, Omaha.
341-1877

Haydon Gallery
335 No. Eighth Street, Lincoln
475-5421

Haymarket Art Gallery
119 So. 9th Street, Lincoln
475-1061
Hours: 10-4:30 Tues.-Sat.; 1-4 Sunday. Mondays by appointment.
April 1: Opening reception for Sadle and Hubbell, 2 to 4 p.m. *April 1- 22:* Amy Sadle and Tom Hubbell, paintings and ceramics.

Hillmer Art Gallery
College of St. Mary,
1901 So. 72nd Street, Omaha
399-2621
Hours: 1-5 daily except Friday.
April 9 - April 22: Exhibit of art by Omaha area Catholic High School students.

Inter Arts Project
2919 Leavenworth, Omaha

Iowa Western Community College Fine Arts Gallery
2700 College Road, Council Bluffs
325-3352
Hours: 8 a.m. - 10 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
April 2-27: Foto-Stops 90 Photography Competition.

Jewish Community Center
333 So. 132nd St., Omaha
334-8200
Hours: 8 a.m.-10 p.m. M-Th.; 8-5 Fri.; 1-7 Sat.; 1-7 Sun.

Joslyn Art Museum
2200 Dodge, Omaha
342-3300
Hours: 10-5 Tues., Wed., Fri. & Sat.; 10-9 Thurs.; 1-5 Sunday.
Admission: $2 for adults, $1 under 12.
Free Saturday before noon and to members.
Through April 8: "Virtue Rewarded: Victorian Paintings from the Forbes Magazine Collection."
April 21 - June 24: "Jim Dine Drawings 1973-1987."

Local Artists Exchange
Standard Blue
1415 Harney, Omaha
April 6-22: 1990 Earth Day Art Show, sponsored by Recycle Omaha. Entry deadline is April 2, call Isabel Cohen for information, 345-5387.

Museum of Nebraska Art
24th and Central Ave., Kearney
(308) 234-8559
Hours: 1-5 Tuesday thru Saturday
1990 Shows:
April 1-27: Contrasts: Kent Bellows and John Sparagana. *April 29 - May 4:* Kearney Schools Honors Show.

Passageway Gallery
417 So. 11th, Omaha
341-1910
Hours: 11-5 M-W; 11-9 Thurs.; 11-10 Fri. & Sat.; 12-5 Sun.

Photographer's Gallery, Inc.
4831 Dodge Street, Omaha
551-5731
Hours: 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Mon.-Fri.; 1-5 Sun.; Closed Sat.; or by appointment anytime.

Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery
12th and R Streets, UNL Campus, Lincoln
472-2461
Hours: Tues. & Wed. 10-5; Sun. 2-9; Thurs.-Sat. 10-5 and 7-9; closed Mon.

13th Street Gallery
1264 So. 13th Street, Omaha
Mixed media

University of Nebraska at Omaha Gallery
62nd and Dodge Streets, Omaha
554-2686
Hours: 8-5 Monday-Friday

Art Institute of Chicago
Michigan at Adams, Chicago, Ill.
(312) 443-3600
Hours: 10:30 -4:30 Mon., Wed.-Fri.; 10:30-8 Tues.; 10-5 Sat.; noon-5 Sun. *Suggested Admission:* $5; seniors, students, $2.50.
Continuing: Ellsworth Kelly. Six paintings conceived especially for the museum's Sculpture Court. *Through June 25:* "Designed by the Yard -- 20th Century Pattern Repeats."
Through June 3: "What's New: Mexico City."
May 19 - August 12: "Monet in the '90s: The Series Paintings." Advance ticket now available through TicketMaster outlets. Charge by phone (312) 559-0200.

Des Moines Art Center
4700 Grand Ave.; Des Moines, Iowa
(515) 277-4405
Hours: 11-5 T, W, F, Sat.; 11-9 Thurs.; noon-5 Sun.; closed Mon.
Through April 8: T.L. Solien and Mark Gordon; Print Show: A Selection from the Permanent Collection.

Museum of Contemporary Art
237 E. Ontario; Chicago, Ill.
(312) 280-5161
Hours: 10-5 Tues.-Sat.; noon-5 Sunday

Museum of Contemporary Photography
Columbia College
600 So. Michigan Ave.; Chicago, Ill.
(312) 663-5554

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art
4525 Oak Street; Kansas City, Mo.
(816) 561-4000
Hours: 10-5 Tues.-Sat.; 1-5 Sunday.
Admission: $3 adults; $1 students.
Permanent collection free on Sat.
April 6 - June 3: "Contemporary Illustrated Books: Word and Image, 1968-1987."
April 21 - June 17: "Impressionism: Selections from Five American Museums." Features 85 paintings and sculptures by the most celebrated Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, including Manet, Degas, Cassatt, Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Cezanne, Seurat, Gauguin and Van Gogh. Advance tickets available by calling (816) 751-1331.
April 29 - June 3: "Warrington Colescott: Forty Years of Printmaking."

Peace Museum
430 W. Erie, Chicago, IL
(312) 440-1860
Hours: noon to 5 daily; noon to 8 Thursday
Current: "Everyone Has the Right to..." Art interpreting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
Permanent Exhibits: "The Unforgettable Fire," drawings by survivors of atomic bombings' "The Ribbon," textile art on the themes of life and hope.

Sioux City Art Center
513 Nebraska Street
Sioux City, Iowa

Terra Museum of American Art
666 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL
(312) 664-3939
Hours: Tues. noon to 8; Wed. - Sat. 10-5; Sunday noon to 5

Walker Gallery
Vineland Place, Minneapolis, Minn.
(612) 375-7622
(612) 375-7636 Recording
Permanent: Cowles Conservatory: Horticultural installation and "Standing Glass Fish" by Gehry. *Through May 13:* "Jasper Johns: Printed Symbols"

Area Events

ASSORTED EVENTS

April 1: Super Cities Walk. A national fund raiser for the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the walk will begin in Central Park Mall and travel through city parks and the Old Market. Call 345-9026 for information.

April 10: Green Peace lecture and slide presentation at Creighton University Student Center, 9 p.m., free.

April 13: Dr. Jim Carpenter of Kansas State University will discuss the whooping crane at 7:30 p.m. at Henry Doorly Zoo. General admission is $3. Call 733-8401 for information.

April 21: The Designer's Showhouse '90 begins at Joslyn Castle, 3902 Davenport. Admission is $8. Hours are 8-8 Monday and Tuesday; 10-8 Wednesday, Thursday and Friday; and noon to 5 Saturday and Sunday. Call 393-3637 for more information. The Showhouse continues through May 20.

DANCE

April 2: The Rustavi Soviet Georgia Dance Company will appear at the Orpheum Theater at 7:30 p.m. Call 342-7107 for tickets.

April 20 & 21: Ballet Omaha presents "Cantata" and "Beauty and the Beast" at 8 p.m. at the Orpheum. Call 346-7394 for information.

FILM

April 8: "Hour of the Star" at Joslyn, 2 and 4:30 p.m. General admission is $3.50. Call 342-3300 for more information.

Sheldon Film Series: Films are shown at the Sheldon Film Theater, 12th and R on the UNL Campus in Lincoln. For information, call 472-5353.

April 1: "Henry V," 2, 4:30, 7 & 9:30 p.m.

April 7: The 17th Annual Student Film Awards of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Free screenings start at 10 a.m.

April 5,6,7,12,13,14,15: "Drugstore Cowboy," showings at 7 and 9:15 p.m. Matinees Saturdays at 12:45 and 3; Sunday at 2:30 and 4:45.

April 8: "Half of Heaven," by Manuel Gutierrez Aragon (Spain, 1986), 2:30, 4:45, 7 & 9:15.

April 29: "Dragon Chow," by Jan Schutte (Germany, 1987), 3, 5, 7 and 9 p.m.

UNO's Spring Moving Pictures Extravaganza with screenings at the Eppley Auditorium. General admission is $2. Call 554-2623 for information.

April 4 & 6: "Polyester" at 8 p.m.

April 7 & 8: "Pink Flamingos" at 8 p.m. Saturday, 6 p.m. Sunday.

April 13-15: "The Little Thief," Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 6.

April 20-22: "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 6 p.m. Sunday.

April 25 & 27: "Monty Python's Meaning of Life" at 8 p.m.

MUSIC

April 1: Bagels and Bach Concert at Joslyn with the Basically Baroque Harpsichord and Oboe Duo. Brunch at 10:15, music at 11:15, general admission is $7.50.

April 5 & 7: Omaha Symphony in concert at the Orpheum, 8 p.m. Call 342-3836 for ticket information.

April 13 & 14: Omaha Symphony Superpops "Salute to Sousa" at 8 p.m. at the Orpheum. Call 342-3836 for tickets.

April 23: Tuesday Musical presents The Emerson Quartet at the Joslyn Witherspoon Concert Hall at 8 p.m. Call 551-4805 for information.

April 28: Omaha Symphony Chamber Orchestra. "The Messiah" with the Carlton College Choir, 7 p.m. at Joslyn Witherspoon Concert Hall. Call 342-3560 for information.

April 29: Creighton University's Spring Music Concert at 7:30 p.m. in the Student Center Ballroom. Free.

April 29: Nebraska Choral Arts Society presents "Magnificently Mozart" at First Congregational Church, 421 So. 36th at 8 p.m. General admission is $8.

SPORTS

Labor disputes won't delay baseball in Omaha. The Royals play their home games at Rosenblatt Stadium. Call 444-4750 or 734-2550 for ticket information. Home games are:

April 6-8: vs. Nashville. Friday and Saturday at 7:05; Sunday at 2:05.

April 9-11: vs. Indianapolis at 7:05 p.m.

April 13-15: vs. Buffalo at 7:05 Friday and Saturday; 2:05 Sunday.

April 21-23: vs. Louisville at 2:05 Saturday and Sunday; 7:05 Monday.

April 30: vs. Denver at 7:05.

THEATER

April: "Do Black Patent Leather Shoes Really Reflect Up?" at the Upstairs Dinner Theater, 344-7777.

April: "Nunsense" at the Firehouse Dinner and Theater, 346-8833.

April 1, 4-8: "Once Upon A Mattress" at Creighton University's Interim Performing Arts Center. Call 280-2636 for information.

April 5-25: "Jacques Brell Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris," at the Jewish Community Center. General admission is $10. Call 334-8200 for ticket information.

April 20-22 and 27-29: "Born Yesterday" at the Bellevue Little Theater. Call 291-1554 for information.

Through April 8: "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing" at Emmy Gifford Children's Theater, 345-4849.

Opening April 13: "Social Security" at the Omaha Community Playhouse. Call 553-0800 for reservations.

Opening April 20: "Barney's" opens at the Circle Theater, all 553-4715 for information.

Opening April 20: "The Secret Garden" at Emmy Gifford Children's Theater. Call 345-4849 for ticket information.

A New Threat to the Old Market

by John Boyd

The Artist's Cooperative Gallery in the Old Market is set for demolition to make way for a five-story parking garage, ostensibly for the Old Market, but rumored to be part of a deal to attract a new hotel to the Riverfront Development.

The Old Omaha Association, which has been supportive of the Gallery and has worked to preserve and promote the Old Market, is seeking some say in the design and use of retail space planned for the city garage.

In a recent open letter to its friends, members of the Artist's Cooperative Gallery said:

"We hope that we will be able to relocate and continue our work. Our future is now in the hands of the Mayor, the City Council, and the City Planning Department. Can we ask for your support one more time to do anything you can to help us successfully relocate in the Old Market. Call or write these people and tell them what the Market means to you and what you think is unique about it. We hope you feel our Gallery is an important part of the Market. These people care what you think."

The following names were given, all of whom can be reached at the City-County Building, 1819 Farnam Street, Omaha, NE 68183: Mayor P.J. Morgan; City Council Members Joe Friend, Fred Conley, Jim Cleary, Richard Takechi, Steve Tomasek, Steve Exon, and Subby Anzaldo; City Planner Greg Peterson; Acting City Planning Director S.P. Benson.

In the Mayor's Office It's a Small (But Fashionable) World

by John Boyd

Yes folks, it's a small (and fashionable) world here in Omaha.

In one day (March 8) two things occured to awaken me to the importance of fashion in our civic affairs.

First, I picked up the re-packaged World-Herald. And,

reading the re-packaged Living section I learned from the headline that "The 'Real' Annie Morgan Likes Pretty, Casual Styles." I learned that she has a two-room walk-in closet; that she is 5'5", 120-pounds and wears a size eight. The best quote was "If I had to pick what I liked better -- shoes or coats -- I couldn't decide. I like them both."

And, we discovered that when the Mayoral couple visit other cities the first (only?) order of business is shopping. "We shop for entertainment when we go on trips," Mrs. Morgan said. "We don't sightsee, and we don't play golf. So we shop."

Fashion Memo

So imagine my lack of surprise when later the same day I came into posession of an official City of Omaha Inter-Office Communication from Mayoral Assistant Diane Zipay to "ALL DEPARTMENT HEAD (sic), WIVES, SECRETARIES, AND 3RD FLOOR STAFF MEMBERS."

The rest of the memo, following, speaks for itself:

SUBJECT: QUESTIONNAIRE

Casual Corner Clothing Store, Westroads location, would like to put on a fashion show for the Mayor's 3rd floor and other interested parties in the city.

We would like your input. Please take a few moments and fill out this questionnaire and return to Marlene Hassler, Mayor's Action Office, by March 9th. Please circle your preference.

1. Date: March 21 or 28, on a Wednesday.

2. Time: right after 5:00 p.m. or later, such as 7:00 p.m.

3. Refreshments: desserts or wine and cheese

4. Attire to be modeled: casual or mixture (casual/working)

5. Would you like to be a model? yes no

6. I am interested in attending. yes no

Folks, I could certainly argue that many of our fine civil servants need some help in the fashion department, but I think I could argue more convincingly that other urgent city problems could use the attention of a mayoral assistant and action office employee.

Care of Niobrara Belongs in Competent Rural Hands

The author lives in Valentine and sometimes writes under the pen name Jen Transhue
by Joan Matheson

The Niobrara is the most beautiful river in Nebraska. It is not untouched In 1963, people downstream from Cherry County succeeded in getting the federal government to build them a dam on the Snake River, the Niobrara's most abundant tributary. Since then, the lion's share of the Snake's water carouses down an irrigation canal.

In 1977, a subsequent demand for water culminated in a plan for a dam on the Niobrara itself. This was supported by Congresswoman Virginia Smith, but many Sandhillers, saddened by the diminution of the Niobrara due to the first dam, began to voice their opposition.

As the struggle heated up, it became necessary for the river's defenders to seek political support from the southeastern cities. The Audubon Society was of great help in that, especially after they suggested that the Niobrara become a Scenic River.

The people came. They went down the river in canoes and tubes. There were so many that they became an embarrassment of riches. It has to be admitted that the Niobrara is a little river with passages that are no wider than 60 or 70 feet. It is deep enough to reach one's ankles and ofttimes one's knees. There are even deep holes where the turbulence of a sunken tree has excavated the sand.

By the end of summer, 1986, so much happy traffic had passed down the river that the residents of Valentine, rallied by the canoe liveries, had a clean sweep down the river to clean up the debris. Three years went by.

Solutions From Non-Sandhillers

Then, suddenly, Senator James Exon produced a Scenic Rivers bill of his own! That was strange because such initiatives are supposed to come from the local source -- the Representative of that district. Congresswoman Smith is still claiming that she wants to find out what her constituents think about it. One can understand her confusion. The urban papers keep printing stories about the enthusiastic support of Sandhillers while the Sandhillers keep polling heavily against it. The County Commissions of Cherry, Keya Paha and Brown oppose it. The Nebraska Cattlemen's Association opposes it. Nine out of 10 residents oppose it.

Shortly after Senator Exon's curious eruption, Congressman Doug Bereuter of the First District also violated Smith's turf, offering a plan for a National Park! That was too extravagant and quietly passed away. But Bereuter had closed meetings with all the county commissions. He seemed shy about meeting the voters, since they couldn't vote for him, anyway.

Next came Peter Hoagland of the Second Congressional District, and he also had closed meetings with the County Commissions. He even went for a walk along the bank of the Niobrara for -- oh! --it must have been at least 20 yards.

When questioned about his position, Exon remarked that he wanted to get rid of those boat docks and trailer camps and cement mills. (Nothing of the kind exists in the canyon.) But Exon has promised a hearing. Reportedly it will be in the form of a panel of eight debaters who will discuss the pros and cons. This is what political managers call "structured hearings." Victims call them "herrings"; canned pro forma in snake oil.

Who's Involved

Four factions can be discerned in this struggle. First are the citizens and owners of these lands who want to get on with their lives on family farms and ranches. Second are the other citizens and owners who oppose the Scenic River designation, perhaps hoping for more irrigation water later. Third are the conservation groups that want the Scenic River. Fourth are the members of the Nebraska Delegation who are determined to have it for reasons we do not know except that they have jumped fences to support it.

As for the Scenic Rivers Bill, three local members of the Audubon Society and the Nature Conservancy agree that the conception is strange and urban. Urban people worry about beltways and freeways and highways. The Scenic River is a water highway. But the water passing down between the canyon walls is just the run-off. The real river is in the watersheds. The Scenic River offers no protection to watersheds.

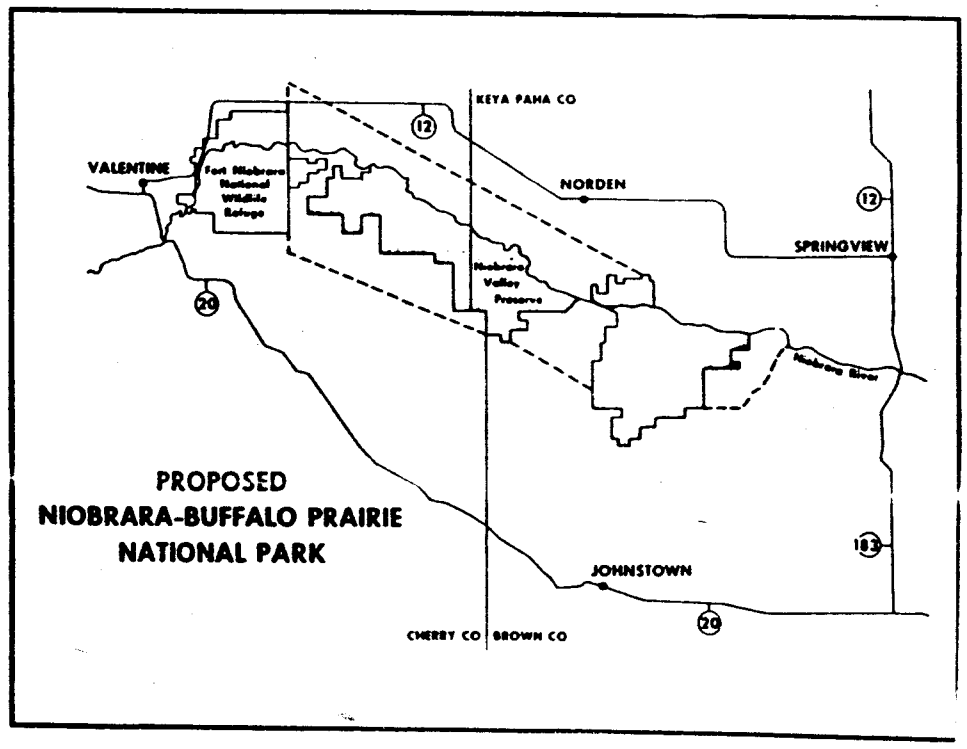
Educate the Rural Population

Conservation groups are going to have to take the Jeffersonian route and educate the rural population in the necessity of conservation and in the skills that will serve them in the doing. We cannot go on allowing the federal government to monopolize the resources of the states. The agencies of the federal government have proven themselves again and again to be "incompetent and uncaring." There is a reason why that is inevitable.

Our federal government is designed to be in charge of "all matters that must be everywhere the same." That is the great web of services and standards in which the administrators' whole focus is on the universality of its systems.

Our land base, quite the contrary, reaches from above the polar circle to the sub-tropics of Hawaii. No other nation on earth, not Russia, not China, not Canada or Brazil, has variables so extreme, nor so many so closely packed that from county to county, soils, subsoils and water chemistry can be radically different.

These matters are precisely the cares of the states, who must help in the formation of competent rural populations. Urban managers cannot do it. As Joseph Wood Krutch put it, "Knowledge is not enough. There must also be love."



Senator Exon's Meeting in Valentine Fails to Comfort Uneasy Sandhillers

by Joan Matheson

On March 17, Senators Exon and Kerrey appeared at the Valentine High School gymnasium to talk about the Scenic River bill before anxious Sandhillers. Senator Exon tried to reassure them, saying, "This is not an attempt of the federal government to seize property rights. I'm here to listen and learn. We're fortunate today for the good care of the landowners along the Niobrara. If there are major flaws in this bill, we can change them."

The big objection muttered among those sitting in the bleachers was that nothing was defined in the bill except that whatever would later be decided would concern the Niobrara. It seemed pretty strange that the Senate would pass so blank a check.

The first to present a statement to the senators was Robert Gass, Cherry County's member of the NRD board of the Middle Niobrara. Gass asked if anyone had made a study of existing Scenic Rivers to find out what actually happened to people and rivers subjected to this ethereal conception of conservation. "I believe in private ownership," he said. "I also believe in local control. Over 40 percent of the United States is owned by the federal government.

"I have seen many letters from people with property in the designated areas of other states," said Gass. "The testimony is very unpleasant, some inhumane, and just downright undemocratic. Most letters are about how the management (Rules and Regulations) differ from the interpretation of the Rivers Act."

Landowners supporting the Scenic Rivers designation also testified. These are sincere people with a great sense of the preciousness of the river and its habitats. They believe the federal government will save the Niobrara.

Commissioner Bill Ward of Cherry County said the counties are now working on their own cooperative plan fo r the ongoing conservation of the Niobrara.

Senator Exon said the counties had told him that some time ago, and he had told the counties that he would pull the bill and let them do it, but he had never heard anything more from them.

Greatly surprised, Ward called the State NRD Commission in Lincoln after the senators had left, and he learned that the State NRD had received Exon's message but had not forwarded it to the counties *because it didn't seem important.*

Many said they were reminded of the Challenger catastrophe. One woman expressed the fears of those who opppose putting the Niobrara in the care of a hierarchy: "the general is never at the front, the soldier at the front is supposed to follow orders, but nobody has a complete nervous system."